

SOMALILAND: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

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Mr. Chairman and Honorable Members of the House esteemed subcommittees:

I am very pleased, indeed honored to appear before you today to participate in the discussion on the current situation in Somalia (the former Italian colony of Somalia), which undoubtedly presents all the signs of an evolving crisis that poses an unmistakable threat to the entire Horn of Africa. In the process, I will briefly review the situation in the Republic of Somaliland and its remarkable social, economic and political development. More importantly, I will shed light on the real security threats it has been facing, its aspirations and its resolve to stand free and independent and its unwavering commitment to fight international terrorism.

Accordingly, I will, for the most part, cede the ground for the distinguished Assistant secretary of State for African Affairs, Dr. Frazer and others to address the current political and security development in Somalia and its ramifications for the region.

Historical Background

Somaliland (the former British Somaliland Protectorate) gained full independence on June 26, 1960. Thirty five countries recognized Somaliland immediately. Five days latter, the new government of Somaliland opted to join with the former Italian Somalia, which became independent on July 1960, Unfortunately, the union turned into a disappointment for the people of Somaliland because it ushered in two decades of political subjugation and ten years of armed struggle against Southern domination. By 1988 the conflict turned into a full fledged popular resistance spearheaded by the Somaliland National Movement (SNM). In retaliation Siad Barre's forces razed the City of Hargeisa to the ground through aerial bombing and heavy ground fire. Tens of thousands were killed or injured and about one million fled to Ethiopia and other countries as refugees and displaced persons.

The failed union with Somalia and the -proclamation of the Republic

Victory sided with the people and after the liberation of the total Somaliland soil and the fall of the dictator, Siad Barre, the people of the land exercised their sovereign right by withdrawing from the union and retrieving their sovereignty in May 18, 1991. The historic re-declaration of independence was the main achievement of the famous Burao

Conference which was attended by all the clans of the former British Somaliland Protectorate.

Without doubt, the people's verdict signified two major achievements: the end of the union with Somalia and the rebirth of the Republic of Somaliland. Needless to say it was done in accordance with the nature of the union between the two states which was predicated, to begin with, on *a de facto union*--never made *de jure* for the *act of the union* was never ratified by the joint legislature of the two unified states.

Restoration and reconstruction

Soon after the withdrawal from the union the new national civilian government appointed in Burao embarked on the arduous task of nation-building. Rebuilding of the capital Hargeisa which was 80% destroyed and other urban centers including Burao was immediately started. In few years about 1.5 million land mines were cleared.

Repair and restoration of destroyed and dilapidated infrastructure were immediately started. Soon after, the disarmament and redeployment of the freedom fighters was successfully completed. Within less than a year the first group of the refugees who were living in camps in Ethiopian began to come home. All in all more than 95% of the refugees living in Ethiopia and other contagious countries have returned to their country.

Democratization and institutional building processes.

By May 2001 democratization process and institutional building programs were in full swing. The first secular constitution was ratified by a landslide majority--97% of the ballots. The first article of the constitution declares Somaliland a sovereign independent republic. In December 2002 local government elections were held, followed by the qualification of three political parties as national parties. In April 2003, the first Presidential elections, contested by candidates from the three parties, were held and in September 2005 the first multi-party parliamentary elections for the House of Representatives were held. All those elections were supervised by representatives from the International community and were deemed transparent and free.

It is worth mentioning, that institutionalization of a market-driven free economic system, had taken hold while the democratization process was unfolding. Today Somaliland is a home of an energetic and booming private sector. The forces of the market, not the government, largely regulate the system. Somaliland's private sector successfully operates airlines that connect the region to Europe and the Middle East, as well efficient International banking and telecommunication enterprises to mention a few..

The quest for international recognition

To date Somaliland is a de-facto independent republic that has not received de-jure recognition. Nonetheless its quest for international recognition is consistent with article III of the OAU charter and article IV of the Constitutive Act of the African Union (AU),

which states that the Union shall function in accordance with the following principles: respect for the borders existing on achievement of independence” Somaliland today is within the borders it inherited on the 26 of June 1960, when it achieved its independence. Somaliland, therefore complies with Article 4 of the Constitutive Act of the African Union. Other African states have been united with neighboring states and subsequently reclaimed their independence in accordance with these principles. They include those which made up the Mali Federation, the union of Senegal, Gambia and Sao Tome and Principe. The dissolution of the United Arab Republic (the union between Egypt and Syria) followed the same pattern. Likewise, the principle of self-determination was accepted when recognition was given to Bangladesh in 1971 having successfully seceded from Pakistan, so Eritrea, so Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia–Herzegovina and Macedonia having seceded from Yugoslavia.

Moreover, Somaliland fully fulfills the criteria of statehood according to article 1 of the 1933 Montevideo Convention on the rights and duties of states. It has 1) a permanent population, 2) a defined territory (the former British Somaliland) with defined boundaries (Somaliland’s boundaries were drawn in 1884) of which it has effective control, 3) a democratic government and, 4) the capacity to enter into relations with other countries. In addition, Somaliland fulfills the criteria for recognizing new states according to the guidelines set by the European Union. Such criteria were applied to recognize the European states mentioned above.

It is appropriate to mention here that Somaliland’s application for the AU membership has been received well. The report of the AU fact-finding mission to Somaliland (April 30 to May 4 2005) states:

The message was the same every place: “the irreversible independence of Somaliland; no return to the union with Somalia; the quest for recognition from the AU and the international community.”

Relations with Somalia

In light of the foregoing, Somaliland’s position vis-a-vis Somalia has been and is that which defines bilateral relations, though there is none now, between two separate entities as they were prior to the union of 1960. As such, any future relations will be akin to the relations Somaliland has with other neighboring countries in the Horn of Africa like the Somali-speaking Djibouti and Ethiopia.

In this vein, it is important to note that Somaliland did not attend any of the over ten reconciliation conferences since 1991 when it re-claimed its sovereignty. This is because, a) it withdrew from the union and, b) it had no one to reconcile with. Now with the conclusion of the last reconciliation conference in Kenya and the formation of what is called the transitional Federal Government (TFG) now trying with apparent difficulty to have a foothold in Somalia, Somaliland’s position remains the same.

However, the people and the government of Somaliland would like to extend their hands to their former partner to forge friendly relations through which mutual recognition will be exchanged as two sovereign states. This is because unity can not be forced, and in reality, we trust that Somali solidarity and unity of purpose will undoubtedly be greatly enhanced by having two independent political systems in Hargeisa and Mogadishu. In this regard, it should be remembered, that another Somali speaking entity, which had also decided against the unity mania, is the republic of Djibouti.

The threat of Islamic terrorism

Islamic terrorism is a relatively new phenomenon in the culture of the Somali-speaking communities in Horn of Africa. Traditionally the Somalis adhere to the Sunni sect of Islam and overwhelmingly follow the *Safii* School of Islamic jurisprudence. As a matter of fact Islam was spread by the Sufi brotherhoods (*Tariqa*) led by *al-Qaadiiriya*. They are known for their scholarly orientation, gentility and tolerance. However, the advent of the petro-dollar--propelled *neo-Wahabism* has seriously eroded the Tariqas' influence in the last thirty years. Indeed it did not only sup-plant them, but it pushed them against the wall.

The vacuum has been filled by ill-educated Somali Wahabists like the former Barre jailer Hassan Dahir Aways who is the leader of Islamists who are controlling most of the territories of the former Italian colony of Somalia. Their plan is threefold: 1) to take over all Somalia and declare an Islamic Emirate, 2) Infiltrate Somaliland, the only secular democracy in the Somali-speaking region of the Horn, and de-stabilize it and take it over with the support of local Islamists, and 3) destabilize Ethiopia and Kenya using local elements so as to topple the two other secular Republics in the Horn. Djibouti will be bypassed first then dealt with latter.

Islamist's threat to Somaliland

Threat of Islamists to Somaliland is a serious one. First, we have our own Islamists, albeit a minority. But nothing is louder than success and the successes of the likes of Aways are not but a warning of danger to come. Second, we are fully aware that the Islamists whether in Somalia, Afghanistan, or in the Arabian Peninsula see the secular political order in Somaliland as a threat to be nipped in bud. Third, and more importantly, they are fully aware of Somaliland's role in the war against terrorism in the Horn of Africa. As a pay back, they targeted non-Muslim international workers in Somaliland and killed Annalena Tonelli from Italy (October 2003), Richard and Enid Eyeington from Britain (October, 2003) and Kenyan Florence Cheriuyot (April 2005). All these criminal operations and many others, stopped in time, by Somaliland's Security Services were planned in Mogadishu under the supervision of no one other the Al-Qaeda-trained terrorist Aden Hashi known as Ayro. Currently there are more than a dozen terrorist awaiting executions in Somaliland's jails.

From now to eternity Somaliland—US relations

Mr. Chairman, Students and scholars of political history are of the view that the entire economic and sociopolitical framework of the world has changed totally at the end of Cold War and has changed the possibilities which face African nations. Yet within this period and changed environment, Somaliland has presented itself as a secular democracy, to the new world. As such, Somaliland, has within the constraints imposed by its history—beginning from its fateful union with the former Italian colony of Somalia and its resultant death and destruction, has been trying to build itself into a recognized country. Recognizing America’s strategic significance as the sole superpower in a unipolar world, indeed as the leader of the Free World, Somaliland—as a matter of national survival—has undertaken, to the level allowed by its current limited capabilities, extensive efforts to forge close relationship with the US. This is because such a relationship will, among other things, have a benign influence on our relations with the rest of the international community.

Somaliland’s known assets in developing such a relationship are imbedded in its strategic location at the southern shores of the Gulf of Aden, its commitment to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the US in the fight against international terrorism and its ability to not only deepen the roots of its democratic system, but to also be a fearless defender of human dignity and freedom.

In this relationship, it is understood that the onus is on Somaliland to prove its compliance with US standers and to demonstrate that the country is a state under democratically achieved rule of law. And this, Somaliland had done successfully. **Mr. Chairman,** Somaliland stands tall as a beacon for democracy and human dignity in the turbulent Horn of African. Nonetheless it is standing lonely for the free world has been hesitant, thus far, to meet its moral obligation toward this deserving democracy. **Mr. Chairman,** time has come for the free world to meet this moral obligation.

Mr. Chairman, what the people of Somaliland need from gallant American people and its government is threefold: 1) Political/diplomatic support to ensure its existence and its survival as viable democracy, 2) Security and security related support to withstand the onslaught of Islamic terrorism, and 3, economic support to meet its pressing need without which its viability will be gravely undermined. I hope that this *Congress* will go down in history as the initiator of this policy.

In Conclusion,

The people of Somaliland have spoken. They have tried unity and the payback was heartbreak. They paid in blood, plenty of it to retrieve their Sovereignty. They are not willing to lose it again come hell or high water. It is Somaliland today, tomorrow and forever.

Mr. Chairman, Somaliland was the Darfur of yesteryear. Never again will Somaliland’s sovereignty be sacrificed for an impracticable Somali unity. Never again will aggressors from Somalia or anywhere else bomb our mothers and children to death. Never, never, never again.